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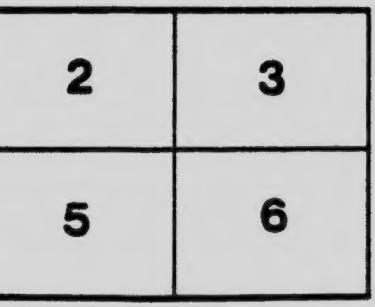

THE DISCOVERERS: A POEM: BY W. WILFRED CAMPBELL: ISSUED FOR THE NEW YEAR, 1905.

68843

THE DISCOVERERS.

This poem is dedicated to the memory of all those great souls who, in days gone by, in the bold spirit of discovery ventured out on the then trackless seas of the unknown west, in quest of this New World, which their undaunted zeal and enterprize has won for us, as a boon to the race and a blessing to mankind.

They feared no unknown, saw no horizon dark,
Counted no danger ; dreamed all seas their road
To possible futures .—Struck no craven sail
For sloth or indolent cowardice ; steered their keels
O'er crests of heaving ocean, leagues of brine,
While Hope firm kept the tiller, Faith,, in dreams,
Saw coasts of gleaming continents looming large
Beyond the ultimate of the sea's far rim.
Thus was it ever. Souls too great for sloth
And impotent ease, goaded by inward pain
Of some divine, great yearning restlessness ;
Which would not sit at home on servile shores
And take the good their father's wrought in days
Long-ancient time-ward,—reap what others sowed ;
But, nobler, sought to win a world their own,
Not conquered by others, but a virgin shore,
Where men might build the future ; rear new realms
Of human effort ; forgetful of the past,
And all its ill and failure ; raising anew
The Godlike dreams of genius, knowing only
Immortal possibility of man
To grow to larger vastness, holier dreams,
Made certain in straight laws of human life,
And national vision ; lived in lofty lives.
Of manhood strong and noblest womanhood.

So thus it was, and is, and e'er will be !
The ill we do we leave behind us as
The phantom cloak of yesterday's sleep, thrown of
At newer waking to life's splendid dawn.
So dreamed they, eager, in those olden days
Saw visions in the future, round the west
Of Europe's fading sunsets ; held a hope
Of some new paradise for poor men's cure
From despotisms of old dynasties,
And cruel iron creeds of warped despairs.
Hungering for light and truth righteousness,
So launched they, setting sail toward sunset verge,
Of lonely, inhospitable Ocean hurling back
From his gray mane sad wrecks of their desires.

We know their story, read the truth where they
Knew only in man's hope and loftier soul
Which strove and dared and greatly overcame,
Conquering scorn of man and veils of doubt,
Wresting from nature half her secret, cruel,
Wherewith she darkens down in glooms apart
The mystery of this planet, where we sleep
And wake and toil, redeeming high resolves,
Chaining the future to the present act.

We ponder on their daring, their vast hope,
That compassed all a planet in its dream.
We marvel at that stern defiance, where
A single man, in a degenerate age,
Would throw the gauntlet down against a world,
Defying narrow custom, small beliefs,
Strangled in lies ; and staking all on one
Swift certainty of reason, based on thought.
Which read from nature, not from childish tomes
Of baseless superstitions, and dared all,
Left the kind land behind, and ventured out
On what men deemed a hideous demon waste,
An endless vortex, wherein poor souls caught,
Were swept to vastness, gulfed and swallowed down.

We wonder at this greatness, yet we know,
That thus forever shall human greatness be,
Man's only truth in life to stand alone ;
Invincible power the spirit's solitude.

Beneath the sky, that marvel of earth's night,
That vast reproof of all our littleness,
That shining rebuke to our unfaithfulness,
That scorner of our despairs ; 'neath its dim tent
Of fold on fold of fleecy infinities ;
'That soul of man is but a puny thing,
A fork-like snake in its own petty fires,
Which doth not rise to some high eminence
Of human thought and vast forgetfulness

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Of all this common ill and common deed,
And loom to somewhat of that stature, great,
That God, did dream us ! So those mighty souls,
Watching His stars, read nightly fixed and sure,
A certainty, while every yeasty wave,
A monster mountain, roared to gulf them down.

We are a part of that great dream they dreamed.
We know wherein they failed, as all life fails.
We know the greatness they could never dream,
The certainty behind that sunset veil,
Which lured them on beyond its misty verge ;
And we are witness that their hope was sure,
And true and wise and voice of God to men.
We are the witnesses that they were right,
And all the small and common minds were wrong,
The scorners of their faith, the laughers-down
Of their sublime enthusiasms ; like as all
Dim ages of this world have heard and seen.

Yea, we are witnesses that they who hoped,
And greatly planned, and greatly dreamed and dared,
Were greater and more godlike, truer souls
And wiser in their day than those who sat
With shaking head and shallow platitude,
Made foolish vulgar prophecy of defeat ;
Yea, we are witnesses that one true man
With faith in nature his own heart and brain,
And daring, fearless, caring nought for aught,
Save his own trust in some high godlike vision,
Is greater far than all a world of men,
Who are but shadows of a worn out age,
Which they have long outlived ; as rotten trunks
Do mark the place where some huge oak went down.

We are the dream which they did dream ; but we
If we are great as they were, likewise know
That man is ever onward, outward bound
To some far port of his own soul's desire,
Knowing the present ever incomplete,
In love's reflection of the heart's high goal.

And now no more this Western world is deemed
A home for liberty and hope's desire.
Men learn in wisdom, as the years glide on,
And life is ever the same in east or west.
And human nature lost in its own toils
Of earthly strivings, loses that gold thread
Of life's sincerity, repeating o'er again
The grim despotic tyrannies of old,
On newer shores to freedom dedicate
By loftier souls who won this world in vain.

So is it ever, human grief and ill,
And human tyranny know no special strand,
All lands alike to tyrants are a spoil,
From ills of race no continent is immune.
Men cannot flee old evils though they cross
Whole oceans of surges beating in between.
We bear with us the despot in our blood :
It is the race that speaks forever in
Our strivings and our weakness : Nero flames
A newer Rome in each new tyranny
Which wakens a western world to deeds of blood.

And we, who have no continents new to find,
No shadowed planet darkening back our dream,
Who know the new world but the old world new :
The same old evil and the same old gleam
In other guise ; but 'neath the same snakehead,
Lifting ill eyes to choke our visions down
In monster folds of human servitude :—
We, too, as they, are earth's discoverers,
We, likewise, can be fixed in our regard,
We likewise can be brave, sincere and true,
Dreaming far peaks of greatness on ahead,
If we but strive and beat our weakness down ;
Setting our sails, invincible, for those ports
Beyond the common, sheltered shoals of self ;
Cleaving with daring keel those open seas
Of larger life, those heaving floors of hope ;
Marking our course by those fixed stars alone,
For ever steadfast, witnesses of God,
Pointing to continents vast of holier dream.

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